

Surviving “Solutions”: Aligning Performance Improvement Interventions

Surviving Performance Improvement “Solutions”: Aligning Performance Improvement Interventions

By

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Abstract

How can organizations avoid the negative, sometimes chaotic effects of multiple, poorly coordinated “performance improvement” interventions? How can we avoid punishing our external clients or staff with the “side effects” of “solutions” that might benefit our bottom line or internal efficiency at the expense of the value received or perceived by clients and investors and our shared world, a world we all live and depend upon?

Facing multi-billion dollar consulting industry pushing every year new “solutions” that might end causing new and unexpected problems, serious performance consultants and managers know that blaming the “law of unintended consequences” will not prevent clients from leaving, staff turnover, general organizational turmoil, and even national and international consequences associated with change.

Since change is also vital, this article introduces a systemic, multi-level framework to align performance improvement interventions, avoid systemic disruption, measure and eliminate over costs, rework and negative side effects of change.

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“First, Do No Harm”

Hippocrates

According to a 1981 study, approximately one-third of patients’ illnesses in a university hospital were caused by treatment. (Steel, German, Crescenzi, & Anderson, 1981)

With approximately 225,000 deaths per year, treatment-caused, *iatrogenic*¹ factors are the third leading cause of death in the United States – following heart disease and cancer. (Starfield, 2000)

According to 2000 statistics and research (Weingart, Ship, & Aronson, 2000) , treatment-caused deaths break down according the following leading causes:

- 12,000 - unnecessary surgery
- 7,000 – medication errors in hospitals
- 20,000 – other errors in hospitals
- 80,000 – infections in hospitals²
- 106,000 – non-error, negative effects of drugs

The most common causes of treatment-caused deaths are: (1) misdiagnosis; (2) drug interaction; (3) “nosocomial³” infections and (4) incorrect procedures.

¹ The term *iatrogenesis* (from Greek: *Iatros*: physician) refer to adverse effects or complications caused by or resulting from medical treatment or advice.

² 2008 statistics show a growth in treatment-caused deaths and illnesses caused by hospital-breeded “superbugs” resistant to antibiotics. (Landro, 2008)

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“Solutions”-caused problems do not limit to healthcare centers: those familiar with home renovation can relate their experiences to the classic film *“Mr Blandings’ builds his dream house”* (Potter, 1948),⁴ where a New York publicist and his wife -longing to buy a country house in nearby Connecticut to escape Manhattan’s crowded apartments- go through an ordeal of over costs, rework, conflicts with un-coordinated contractors, engineers and architects that end tearing down and rebuilding their new place in twice the expected time and at several times the original budget.

Unlike those classic Hollywood happy endings –the Blandings do get their dream house and live happily there ever after- , organizations engaging in ambitious “organizational change” or “performance improvement” programs often end experiencing recurrent, complex , systemic “hangovers” caused by multiple, uncoordinated and sometimes even conflicting solutions.

Did the CFO launched a *Management-By –Objectives –MBO-* initiative while the COO instituted a *Total Quality Management –TQM-* program? Did anybody read Deming’s *TQM “11th commandment”*⁵? Did the CFO and COO know that those two “solutions” can be strongly antagonistic? Did they have time or tools to check the compatibility of such complex “solutions”?

Had the IT department purchased a costly and promising *Enterprise Resource Planning –ERP-* system *without knowing that* the CEO had just signed off an ambitious *merger agreement -M&A-* with a former rival with a non-compatible IT architecture?

Are several departments enthusiastically engaged in time-consuming, meeting-based training and organizational development initiatives to increase employees’ engagement and improve climate?

³ Nosocomial: related to or acquired in a hospital or treatment center

⁴ This classic comedy played by Carry Grant and Myrna Loy became a cult film, generating “tours” to the Blandings house and a sequel , *The Money Pit* (1986) with Tom Hanks

⁵One of W.F. Deming -TQM’s founder- 14 points for TQM’s implementation “11th: *Eliminate arbitrary numerical targets: Eliminate work standards that prescribe quotas for the work force and numerical goals for people in management*” (Deming, 2000)

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Those and others are early warnings that our organization is descending into some sort of “transformational chaos” that will sooner or later become a larger problem on its own.

Changes in strategic plans, management, mergers and acquisitions and departmental initiatives combined with the multiple models, “solutions”-trained specialists and fads of a multi-billion dollar consulting industry end usually producing a level of systemic chaos that Gloria Gery aptly characterized as “*organizational flagellation*” (Gery, 1992) and is –in our experience as well as probably in yours- one of the major sources of employees’ turnover, demotivation and resistance to participation in “performance improvement” initiatives.

Check our “early signs” of solutions-caused, “*iatrogenic*” problems checklist in Table 1. Consider each “Yes” a “flag” for a potentially serious problem.

Table 1: “Solutions” alignment problems early warning signals checklist

Indicators	Yes?
■ We are implementing a “(solution)” needs assessment	
■ We are improving a “(function)” performance improvement program	
■ We are improving <i>several</i> “(function)” performance improvement programs simultaneously	
■ Complains about too many meetings for “improvement” initiatives	
■ PI projects at functional level	
■ Executive compensation tied to functional performance	
■ Vision and mission are general, rather philosophical statements, with only “soft” implementation	
■ No metrics are defined for vision and mission	
■ Each department or function has a written vision and mission statement	

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- Functions have strategic plans
 - There is not a common definition of what is “strategic” (other than what the “(superior-level official)” wants
 - Balanced scorecard is based on “adding up” functional goals
 - Budget is based on “adding up” functional budgets and plans
 - People complains about too much time in “improvement” or “change” projects at works’ expense
-

As “solutions” vendors –deceitfully self-introduced as solution-“consultants”⁶- push to sell their “solutions” to companies’ functional areas –Human Resources, IT, Finance, Marketing and Sales being the most prolific buyers- that in turn “pull” from inside for their functional priorities: their climate surveys, ERPs, MBOs and CRMs , a flurry of unconnected and frequently conflictive “change” or “improvement” initiatives takes place in the organization⁷.

Confusing “performance improvement” with “solutions implementation” often fails because this approach takes for granted that the mere “lack” of a given “solution” or resource –MBO, ERP, CRM- is a genuine organizational “need” or gap in organizational results. When systemic factors that cause the original problem are ignored, “solutions” consultants operate like the subcontractors in the Blandings’ house, creating newly-bred problems and causing systemic chaos.

⁶ “Consultant” has increasingly become a “code word” for “sales person” of a “solution” rather than what it meant in the management or business associated to the likes of Peter Drucker, Roger Kaufman, C.K. Prahalad or Geary Rummmler. Rummmler titled appropriately his latest book “Serious performance consulting” as an indictment of such unethical practices. (Rummmler, Serious performance consulting, 2004)

⁷ In a not infrequent case of our experience studying “dysfunctional” performance improvement initiatives, two functional areas launched their “own” Balanced Scorecard initiatives limited to their functional “silos” and had their own separate Visions and Missions –as if they were separate organizations-. Interestingly, they hired the same “solutions” vendor –which didn’t find abnormal or unethical such situation-

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Furthermore, the “solutions” approach increases the chances of focusing needs assessment and interventions in optimizing subsystems -such as sales or financial performance- at the expense of organizational performance and external clients, investors’ o societal interests.

Without a shared focus on organizational and external clients’ results (Kaufman, Educational System Planning, 1972)–rather than functional efficiencies-, each new functional solution can become a nightmare for some other area or the entire organization.

Think of IT defining “spam” or Internet utilization automatic filters in a university with thousands of online educational users based on purely administrative criteria. Think –conversely- of an enthusiastic distance education department in the same university launching a new, bandwidth-hungry virtual classroom on the standard IT network at peak time.

Function-focused solutions also fail because they treat a systemic problem –such as organizational performance or behavior- with partial “fixes” that ignore systemic connections and interactions between sub-systems at their own peril.

An MBO-based incentives program focused on improving individual results might end rewarding behaviors and decisions that produce losses to the organization –such as maximizing mortgage sales at the expense of credit risk-. A unilateral effort in maximizing bank tellers’ courtesy and cross-selling effort might end causing clients’ complaints about slow service. An equally partial emphasis on “fast service” might also end causing the bank to send clients looking for financial advice straight to the nearest competitor.

The root cause of most “solutions-caused” problems is the lack of a systemic, companywide, comprehensive model for planning and managing interventions. Left to “solutions: vendors, performance improvement interventions tend to run out of control, like the contractors in the *Blandings*’ dream house, increasing costs and rework, reducing the chances for actual improvement and –last but not least- making the organization’s staff and clients’ lives miserable.

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Systemic analysis breakthrough: Performance Improvement models

From its early origins in the work of Kaufman (Kaufman, Corrigan, & Johnson, 1969) (Kaufman, 1972); Brethower and Rummmler (Brethower, 1972) (Rummmler & Brache, 1995) and Gilbert (Gilbert, 1978) , those in the *performance improvement or performance system*⁸ fields developed a unique focus on systemic analysis and solution that emphasized in

- a) Considering performance and behavior as *functions* of a larger context or performance system (Brethower, 1972)
- b) *Defining “need” as a gap between current and desired results*, not as a “lack of” resources or as a subjective “want” (Kaufman, 2006)
- c) *Analyzing how all different factors interacting in a performance system affect performance* and performer and affect each other instead of blaming the performer (Gilbert, 1978) (Rummmler & Brache, 1995) and
- d) *Considering not just the individual, job-level factors* (Gilbert, 1978), but processes, organization (Rummmler, 2004) and societal context (Kaufman, 2006).

These are the good news. The bad news are that because all PI / HPT different models were developed independently and successively in response to the challenges of *different performance levels* –individual, organizational or strategic, societal performance- , they do not “fit” very well and tend to be used as “alternative” approaches rather than as complementary.

Like the sages in the *Sufi* tale, those using a single model usually fail to get the “whole picture” and reducing their chances of coming with a comprehensive solution, fall in the trap of multiple, disconnected and finally dysfunctional initiatives whose success is –at best- temporary.

⁸ Also called more recently –and controversially- Human Performance Technology by the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI)

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Uncovering the elephant sitting in the living room: integrating three performance levels

Although there are multiple performance improvement models –more than 46 according to different studies (ISPI, 2006) (Bernardez, 2006) (Dean & Ripley, 1997) (Kaufman, Thiagarajan, & MacGillis, 1997) -, they can be classified in three main categories according with their focus and scope: *individual performance models* – such as Gilbert’s *Six Boxes* (Gilbert, 1978), Mager’s *performance analysis algorithm* (Mager & Pipe, 1983) , or Spitzer’s *context of work* (Spitzer, 1986) (Spitzer, 1995) -; *organizational performance models* – such as Rummler’s *Anatomy of Performance – AOP* - (Rummler & Brache, 1995), Brethower’s *Total Performance System –TPS-* (Brethower, 1972) , Tosti’s & Carleton’s *Organizational SCAN* (Vanguard Consulting Inc., 1996) (Carleton & Lineberry, 2004) or Langdon’s *Language of Work* (Langdon, 1995) – and *strategic, societal performance models* –such as Kaufman’s *Organizational Elements Model - OEM* - (Kaufman, Corrigan, & Johnson, 1969) (Kaufman, 2006) –

Individual performance models

Individual performance models –such as Gilbert’s classic *Behavior Engineering Model –BEM-* (shown in Table 2) - are quite helpful in understanding and optimizing performance at the job level –the level of the individual worker-.

Table 2: The behavior engineering model (Gilbert, 1978)

	S_d Information	R Instrumentation	S_x Motivation
E – Environmental supports	Data 1. Relevant and frequent feedback about the adequacy of performance 2. Descriptions of what is expected of performance 3. Clear and relevant guides to adequate performance	Instruments 1. Tools and materials of work designed scientifically to match human factors	Incentives 1. Adequate financial incentives made contingent upon performance 2. Nonmonetary incentives made available 3. Career-development opportunities
P – Person’s repertory of behavior	Knowledge 1. Scientifically	Capacity 1. Flexible scheduling of	Motives 1. Assessment of

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designed training that matches the requirements of exemplary performance 2. Placement	performance to match peak capacity 2. Prosthesis 3. Physical shaping 4. Adaptation 5. Selection	people’s motives to work 2. Recruitment of people to match the realities of the situation
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Organizational performance models

A few years later, Gilbert’s former business partners, Geary Rummler and Dale Brethower, took the entire approach to performance analysis and improvement several steps further in the systemic direction, noticing that using Gilbert’s *BEM* model frequently led to optimize individual workers’ performance at the expense of process and organizational performance.

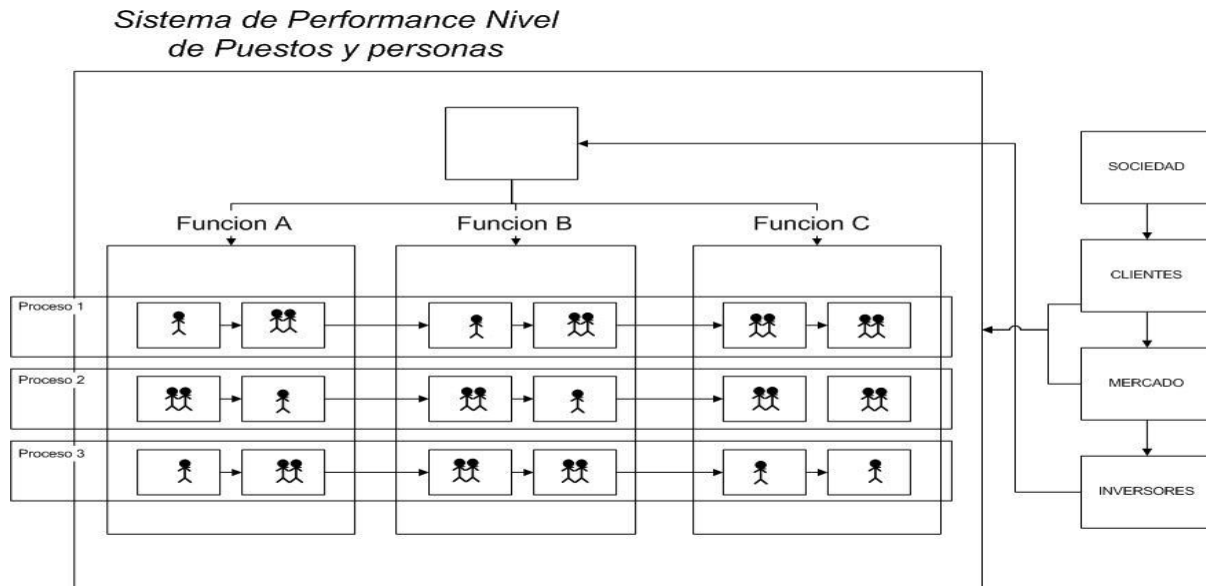
If each worker were allowed to “improve” his/her own activities at the job level based on Gilbert “Six Boxes”, regardless of other co-workers working ahead, before or while collaborating in a *shared work process*, their *collective* performance would experience a noticeable setback –as it would happen if each rower in a coxed four were to row at his/her own pace and rhythm-.

Rummler’s and Brethower’s⁹ *Anatomy Of Performance –AOP-* model started by envisioning three levels of performance –nested one into and under each other-: job level, process level and function level –as shown in Figure 1-

⁹ According to their own report, Geary Rummler and Dale Brethower started expanding and questioning the primitive BEM model during their years of research together, and after parting for decades –Rummler to consulting, Brethower to academia- developed two models AOP and TPS that were in essence variations of a common one. They re-baptized it Anatomy of Performance –AOP- and have been working later years associated at ITSON with AOP.

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Figure 1: Three levels of performance (Rummler & Brache, 1995)



From (Bernardez, 2006)

Rummler’s AOP model analyzes performance in three levels –*job, process, organization*- and at three levels of “performance needs”: –*goals, design, and management*- considered from a performance management perspective.

Table 3: Geary Rummler’s organizational “nine boxes” (Rummler & Brache, 1995)

		Performance needs		
		Goals	Design	Management
Performance level	Organization level	Organization objectives & indicators	Organization design	Organization management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Macro ■ Micro 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Macro ■ Micro 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Macro ■ Micro 	
Process level	Process objectives & indicators	Process design	Process management	

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	Job and task objectives & indicators	Job and task design	Job and task management
Job level	Resources levels & requirements	Resources allocation system	Resources management

Rummler & Brethower’s matrix includes at the lowest level all key elements of Gilbert’s BEM models, although not organized in *Six Boxes*¹⁰.

Strategic, societal performance models

Although Rummler/Brethower’s AOP and Tosti/Carleton’s SCAN include references to the societal context considered as the “supra-system”, their models do not pay such prior intense attention to societal performance as Roger Kaufman’s *Organizational Elements’ Model – OEM* does.

Kaufman’s model –later reframed as part of his *Megaplanning* methodology- focuses on the planning process, particularly in differentiating the true “strategic” part –represented by Mega-level, societal results driven by a *Minimal Ideal Vision* (MIV)¹¹ of the future- from “tactical” levels such as benefits for the organization –Macro- level goals such as revenue, market share or profit- and “operational” –which for Kaufman starts at the “outputs” (products or services) level or Micro-level and includes Activities¹²- and Resources –defined as inputs for Activities-.

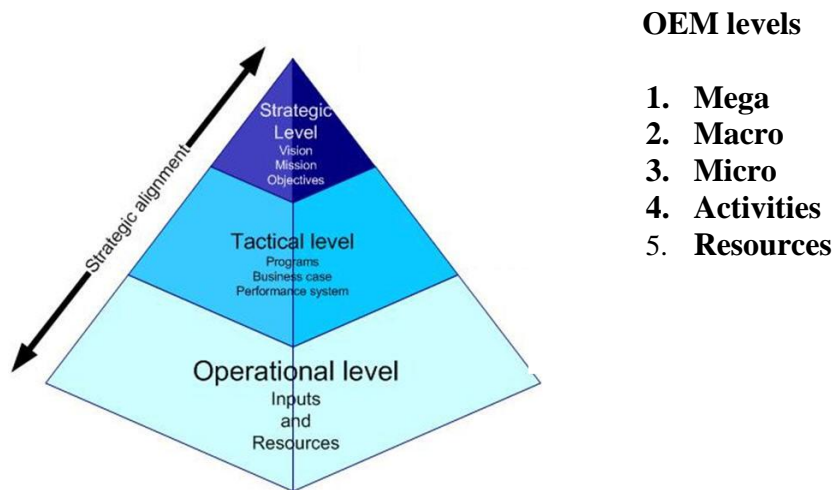
¹⁰ Although Gilbert’s BEM formulation separates “environmental control” factors –see Table 2-, these are considered as part of the “job context” as in a “job description”. The AOP model goes much further by differentiating “job conditions” such as these from process and organizational levels.

¹¹ For a complete description of Kaufman’s MIV see Kaufman’s *Change, Choices and Consequences* (Kaufman, Change, choices and consequences: a guide to Mega thinking and planning, 2006) or Bernardez’s *Tecnologia del Desempeno Humano* (Bernardez, 2006)

¹² Kaufman’s “Activities” are a more general equivalent to what AOP defines as organization and process levels

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Figure 2: Organizational Elements Model –OEM- (Kaufman, 2006)



Kaufman’s model focuses on establishing *vertical alignment* between strategic, tactical and operational results. Such alignment is –according to Kaufman- the only way to guarantee delivering actual value to external stakeholders, keeping the organization useful and focused.

Kaufman’s OEM model provides a uniquely helpful guide to align all internal elements –after all, organizations are not ends unto themselves, but means to achieve results and produce value- and make sure that our sequence of definitions follows an “outside-in”, “top-down” order rather than the other way around.

Using Kaufman’s OEM as a “builder’s plumb”-to continue with the home improvement analogy-, we can keep our performance improvement efforts honest and aligned with results and actual value for external stakeholders and the survival of the organization.

Integrating Kaufman’s OEM, Rummler & Brethower’s AOP and Gilbert BTE as shown in Table 4, we can connect and align the three levels of PI models and get a complete, systemic “blueprint” of what is involved in change and its probable impact in the organization’s overall performance.

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Table 4: Aligning models: multi-level framework

Level	Objectives	Design	Management
	Goals, standards & indicators	“How to”, programs	Implementation, control
Societal/External(Mega)	Mega objectives & indicators	Social & organizational plan strategic directions related to	Social and regional management
■ Community	■ Community	■ Community	■ Market
■ Clients	■ Market	■ Market	■ Policies
■ Market	■ People	■ People	■ Regulations
■ Suppliers	■ Suppliers	■ Suppliers	
■ Value chain			
Organization	Organization objectives & indicators	Organization design	Organization management
■ Macro (org. results)	■ Macro	■ Macro	■ Macro
■ Micro (products)	■ Micro	■ Micro	■ Micro
Processes	Process objectives & indicators	Process design	Process management
■ Internal services			
People & resources	■ Job and task objectives & indicators	■ Job and task design	■ Job and task management
■ “Six boxes”	■ Resources levels & requirements	■ Resources allocation system	■ Resources management
■ Individual performer			

Following a “falling water” path to establish PI intervention sequence

Applying principle (a) of all performance improvement models –adopting a *systemic* view - , we must start by positioning each intervention in one or more of *Table 4*’s 12 cells, according to the levels and steps where the intervention operates.

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Following a “*falling water*” path, those PI interventions that operate at higher levels of the Framework –from upper left corner to the lowest right corner all across Table 4- have wider impact and affect the effectiveness of those at lower levels. A change in our client definition, for example will affect our strategic programs. Changes in our strategic programs will subsequently affect strategic goals and rules, which, in turn, may trickle-down at the organizational goals-Macro level in our profit and loss statement.

When facing multiple performance improvement intervention, Table 4 will help us to (1) make sure that we start by implementing those interventions with the highest and broadest systemic impact first, (2) establish a more effective sequence of PI interventions, (3) explore the “downstream” effects of each PI intervention in others and other non –PI programs and –last but not least- (4) keep our organizational budget under control.

Conversely, if we start our performance improvement initiatives at lower levels, we may face unplanned “uphill battles” against overpowering, upper-level resistance factors that will increase the cost and effort required to achieve success and the risk of “systemic” failure –such as that of a costly IT system at the process level that ignores the strategic priorities of our external clients, wasting their time or delaying our organization’s effective response to their demands.-

The guiding questions summarized in Table 5 help detect and prevent potential misalignment between levels (vertical alignment) and steps (horizontal alignment)

Table 5: Aligning Performance levels: Key questions

Objectives	Design	Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Is our organization adequate to meet the demands of new realities, clients, markets?	<input type="checkbox"/> Is organizational designed aligned with strategic vision and mission?	<input type="checkbox"/> Is management focused on developing and serving future clients?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do we have a clear value proposition for clients and markets key for the future?	<input type="checkbox"/> is there a design of the future / desired organization? <input type="checkbox"/> Are adequate indicators to	<input type="checkbox"/> Has management a fluent and effective communication with clients, market, suppliers

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is our organization adding measurable value to the clients, market, communities it serves? 	<p>measure the accomplishment and progress in achieving the strategic vision and mission defined and in place?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are the vision and future strategy adequately articulated as to be communicated and guide implementation? 	<p>and community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does management invest enough time in exploring future trends and changes in the market, client, supply chain, community?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are strategies correctly aligned communicated top-down, inside-out? <input type="checkbox"/> Are our strategies compatible with our SWOTs? <input type="checkbox"/> Do we have clearly defined products and standards for each level of results defined in our strategy? <input type="checkbox"/> Do we have defined measurable results and standards at Mega, Macro and Micro levels? <input type="checkbox"/> Are those results aligned and compatible with each other? <input type="checkbox"/> Are our Mega results enough to support and sustain our Macro goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are all key organizational processes and functions clearly defined and implemented? <input type="checkbox"/> Are all current functions adequate and adequately coordinated? <input type="checkbox"/> Are products and services that link all functions consistent and adequate? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the current organizational structure and functions adequately support the organizational strategy and performance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are each function goals clearly defined and coordinated with strategy and other functions? <input type="checkbox"/> Is relevant function performance measured? <input type="checkbox"/> Are resources adequately assigned ? <input type="checkbox"/> Are interfaces between functions adequately coordinated?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are clear goals and standards defined for all key processes? <input type="checkbox"/> Are those goals and standards aligned with organization’s and client’s requirements? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are the current processes the most effective and efficient to achieve the goals and meet the performance standards? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are goals and standards for all key processes and sub processes clearly defined? <input type="checkbox"/> Is process performance adequately measured? <input type="checkbox"/> Are adequate resources for each key process? <input type="checkbox"/> Are process interfaces

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adequately coordinated?

- Are Jobs goals and standards clearly defined and communicated to performers?
- Are process requirements adequately supported by jobs and tasks involved?
- Do performers know & understand standards?
- Are Jobs goals and standards adequately aligned with processes' requirements?
- Are tasks and jobs' steps adequately sequenced?
- Are resources and job design adequate?
- Are adequate policies and procedures in place?
- Are adequate incentives for meeting standards?
- Are layout and technology adequate to support tasks and jobs?
- Do performers know when they reach goals?
- Are they competent?
- Is job environment/ context adequate?
- Do performers have the required capacities?

Moving the elephant out of the living room: sequencing change interventions

“All change is disorienting.

Too much change in too little time is destructive”

(Davis & McCallon, 1974)

We are not done yet in avoiding nasty collisions between “solutions”.

Even combining all three performance levels –*external, organizational, individual*- we might discover that –like multiple contractors without a shared blueprint and plan- each improvement intervention might cancel, revert or force to redo previous ones, increasing costs as when carpets installed before piping or electric wiring must be removed and reinstalled.

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Practical application in a university

We will put to use our integration framework in establishing a sequence for change and performance improvement interventions. We will use as an example a real case we solved using the tool.

Our client, a 12,000-student university was implementing multiple change and performance improvement initiatives –most started at the functional level- that were taking the entire organization to a grinding halt. People complained against “change” at all levels and yet, fought bitterly to give their own initiatives priority.

Along a 4-year period, a total of 10 different performance improvement initiatives were implemented in the following order:

1. Each department launched *new educational programs* based on their experts’ assessment of most valuable specialties and technological careers for the next decade.
2. A 10-year *IT infrastructure “master plan”* was launched to “unify the response” and “systematize” multiple departments’ requirements “eliminating redundancies” and “setting common standards”.
3. Due to inter-departmental conflicts during the first year of the IT plan, the university launched a cross-functional communications and team building initiative
4. As a result of the findings of the communications initiative, the university redesigned a common “value chain” linking educational programs with common goals.
5. In order to ensure the alignment between academic and administrative functions, both departments defined *Balanced Scorecards –BSC-* and *Strategy Maps* following Kaplan’s methodology. (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) (Kaplan & Norton, 2004)
6. Based on the goals defined by the BSC process, the university launched a *market development plan* to assess the needs for future educational programs
7. As a consequence of the conflict between the new educational programs -already designed in Step 1 of this list- and the Market Development study findings – unveiled on

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Step 6-, all university departments’ decided to “update” their shared, strategic *Vision and Mission* based on Kaufman’s OEM concepts.

8. Responding to the evidence of insufficient exchange of knowledge and know-how across disciplines, the university started a inter-disciplinary *Knowledge Management* initiative
9. Based on the findings of both BSC and Communications programs, a cross-functional *Change Management initiative* was launched to facilitate the migration from the traditional culture to a new culture.
10. Responding to recommendations from the Change Management initiative, the university launched a *process reengineering* program in order to transition from a “functional” to a “process management” methodology.

The consequences of all this “zigzagging” decision-making process driven by reactions and “fixes” to unexpected consequences of each improvement step were dire.

At the time of our first assessment, most research professors were investing more time in multiple “performance improvement” initiatives than in their primary research or teaching jobs.

Morale was sinking, complaints were mounting and the Department heads and career directors felt confused and frustrated. One of the directors summarized the “change management” team feelings about the overall performance improvement process, at that time: “*We’re deep into Alice in Wonderland’s rabbit hole*”¹³.

Like homeowners lost in a vast reform project without blueprints, the multiple “rabbit holes” created by each performance improvement “step” were delivering new systemic emergencies to address without any end in sight.

¹³ Reference to Lewis Carroll novel’s character, Alice, who in chasing her rabbit through a rabbit hole falls into a parallel world –Wonderland- a magic kingdom hidden behind Alicia’s lookingglass whose inhabitants –the Mad Hatter, the Queen of Hearts- turn logic upside-down. (Carroll, 1865, 2000)

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Back to reality: fixing the “lookingglass” with the PI interventions alignment tool

Based on the University newly defined Vision and Mission and its specific, measurable indicators focused on the university external clients’ priorities, we helped the university management get out of their Alice’s “rabbit hole” by revising and re-sequencing their multiple performance improvement initiatives.

We asked the team to organized the 10 interventions using using our *Table 4 multi-level, PI models alignment framework*, with the results shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Aligning performance improvement interventions - Example

Level	Objectives Goals, standards & indicators	Design “How to”, programs	Management Implementation, control
Social/External(Mega) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community ■ Clients ■ Market ■ Suppliers ■ Value chain 	<i>Vision and Mission (1)</i>	<i>Market development plan (2)</i>	
Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Macro (org. results) ■ Micro (products) 		<i>Value chain redesign (3)</i>	<i>Balanced Scorecard (4)</i>
Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Internal services 		<i>Process reengineering (5)</i>	<i>Change Management (6)</i> <i>KM (7)</i>

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People & resources	<i>IT infrastructure (8)</i>	<i>Communications & Team-Building (9)</i>
■ “Six boxes”		
■ Individual performer		<i>New Educational Programs (10)</i>

Based on this new sequence, we estimated the “gap” between the “trial and error” sequence followed originally and what would be a logical “top-down” sequence.

We asked the evaluation team to estimate the consequences of each “gap”, monetizing the cost wherever possible. Table 7 shows the results.

Table 7: PI interventions misalignment: calculating the costs of “non-quality”

Performance Improvement Initiatives	How it happened “solutions”- focused	How it should be prioritized	Gap ¹⁴	Impact and cost of the Gap
New Educational programs	1	10	+9	Redesign, Low enrollment (50,000)
IT infrastructure (five years)	2	8	+6	Repurchase, retrofit (\$ 50,000)
Communications & team building	3	9	+6	Downtime, repetition (\$ 40,000) (over cost)

¹⁴ A + (plus) sign implies that the intervention was incorrectly anticipated to others. A – (minus) sign implies the intervention was incorrectly delayed.

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				(\$ 35,000)
Value chain redesign	4	3	(1)	Lost contracts (\$ 30,000)
Balanced Scorecard (BSC)	5	4	(1)	Rework (\$ 25,000)
Market development plan	6	2	(4)	Opportunity cost (\$ 50,000)
Vision and Mission	7	1	(6)	All of the above, misalignment
Knowledge Management	8	7	(1)	Loss of information (\$ 12,000)
Change Management program	9	6	(3)	Resistance, conflicts (\$ 20,000)
Process reengineering	10	5	(5)	Rework \$ 30,000)
Potential savings using the PI interventions alignment framework:				(\$ 342,000)

Colleges and other professional organizations established around specialized professional disciplines have a known tendency to create parallel, redundant planning and organization structures. University departments tend to operate in relative isolation from each other, because – according to Daniels and Mathers’ –: *“professionals go to their tasks alone; they gain skill from*

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their own experience and the sharing of that experience with fellow professionals” (Daniels & Mathers, 1997) . This is often the reason why academics often fail to understand that “reality” - as Roger Kaufman uses to say- “is not divided in disciplines or departments” . (Kaufman, 2006)

Such tendency, however, only aggravated the alignment problems: the root cause of the conflicts, rework and frustration ending in a \$ 324,000 loss and –more importantly- an increased resistance to change, was the lack of an integrated, multi-level model to organize and prioritize different PI interventions putting the organization’s results –“health”- ahead of those of the functional areas and their “solutions” consultants –“medicine”-.

Furthermore, using this comprehensive, multi-level interventions organizer as a common framework allowed all “change advocates” championing specific “solutions” to identify and prevent systemic problems and re-organize the existing PI programs in an effective manner, instead of competing and fighting each other.

Conclusion

Improving organizational performance is too important to leave it to multiple “performance improvement models” or “solutions” consultants.

Failing to align and integrate multiple PI “solutions” not only has immediate, measurable and costly consequences, but the long-lasting effect of creating or reinforcing “change aversion” in the organization and its internal and external stakeholders.

Using a multi-level, organization and external clients-focused framework may help organizations and consultants to achieve better results with less pain and effort.

This -by the way-, is what “performance improvement” is all about.

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